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ABSTRACT

Through an understanding of the historical forces that raised the community college to prominence during the past decades and that are now threatening this position, the community college trustee can contribute to the process of securing a base for future progress. The period from 1961 to 1980 saw a tripling of the number of two-year colleges and an eightfold growth in student numbers as community colleges responded to the external pressures of the baby boom, civil rights movement, and technological changes. In today's world, however, concerns about fiscal constraints are accompanied by a shift in emphasis from access to meritocracy as the guiding value in the public priorities for postsecondary education. Much confusion about the mission of the community college stems from these opposing values. Two issues of paramount concern have arisen out of the confrontation between increasingly constrained resource allocations and aspirations for continuing growth and mission expansion. The first of these involves educational quality, while the second concerns faculty commitment, defined as the ability to recognize, agree upon, and contribute to educational priorities. In addressing these issues, trustees of Arizona's community colleges might consider several alternatives, including working with the State Board in its review of the mission of the community colleges; encouraging administrators to experiment with establishing priorities among services; and obtaining information about costs and levels of quality. (HB)

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TRUSTEES AND MISSIONS

OF

ARIZONA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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TRUSTEES AND MISSIONS OF ARIZONA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Richard C. Richardson, Jr.

The historian, Heilbronner, has suggested that our ability to understand the future "without succumbing to false hopes or an equally false despair" rests with our ability to understand the "grand dynamic or history" which represents both the means through which progress painfully won in the past is trampled underfoot and the means by which a base is built for future progress. (Heilbronner, 1961). What are the historic forces that raised the community college to prominence during the past two decades and which now threaten to "trample underfoot" some of the progress so painfully won? How can trustees contribute to the process through which the base for future progress is secured?

In 1961 there were 405 public two-year colleges enrolling just under 645,000 students. By 1980, the number of colleges had nearly tripled and enrollments had increased to nearly 5 million. During this same period a system of community colleges was created for the State of Arizona and grew from two campuses and less than 10,000 students to twenty campuses and more than 100,000 students. (Gernhart, 1981) Clearly, community colleges have played a critical role in helping the nation respond to many of "the greatest external forces of the past two decades", including the domestic consequences of Sputnik, the "tidal wave" of students that followed the "baby boom" after World War II, the new affluence and the civil rights movement. (Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, 1980)

For each of these forces, the community college was the right institution in the right place at the right time because of the way its leaders chose to

define and implement its mission. The rewards were rapid growth in enrollments and an equally rapid expansion of mission. During the past five years, trustees and colleges administrators have continued to pursue the formula for success of the past two decades under circumstances which increasingly suggest the need for a reexamination of community college mission and priorities to determine whether adjustments in the formula are required if community colleges are to have the same success in the next twenty years as they have enjoyed in the past. How have external forces of the past contributed to community college success and what adjustments may be required to adapt to the emerging trends of the Eighties?

Following Heilbronner's thesis, we should expect to find forces which threaten the success of the present as a prerequisite to the changes that must occur to pave the way for success of the future. In 1968, Jencks and Reisman in the Academic Revolution identified two such forces. Community colleges, they wrote, despite their rejection of many conventional academic practices, had turned out to be simply one more part of the larger academic system. As such, they became a safety valve releasing pressures which otherwise might have compelled universities to be more responsive to the new student clientele. (Jencks and Reisman, 1968). Later, writing from the vantage point of the student movement of the early seventies, this criticism was extended by such authors as Karabel into a general criticism that community colleges supported the status quo rather than promoting upward social mobility. (Karabel, 1974) While there may be some truth in this criticism, it has since become evident that community colleges support the status quo less rigorously than other types of colleges and for that reason alone deserve support. However, their rejection of conventional academic practices has led to problems of image and, currently, to confusion about mission.

A second, and less frequently quoted criticism of Jencks and Reisman, has greater implications for the next decade. Two year colleges enrolled many students who would not otherwise go to college. A larger percentage of those would never earn any degree. The cost of educating freshmen of transfer programs was not significantly different in community colleges than it was in four year institutions. One result was to increase both absolute expenditures and the cost per college graduate. During a decade when community colleges still enrolled a relatively modest share of lower division students and higher education, as the means of remedying past discrimination, represented a top priority for public policy the phenomenon of increased costs for uncertain results was not a major concern. In today's world, however, the posssibilty that we may be paying more to produce less has become a central issue in the public policy debate on support for postsecondary education. Adding to the magnitude of the problem has been the success of community colleges in attracting new clientele. No longer are community colleges minor players in the competition for state tax dollars.

Accompanying concerns about fiscal constraints has been a shift in emphasis between meritocracy and access as guiding values in the public priorities for the missions of postsecondary institutions. Meritocratic principles historically have been predominant in American higher education. Institutions provided opportunity to those they defined as qualified with outcomes determined by such factors as ability, persistence and motivation. During the sixties the emphasis on equal opportunity was predicated on the assumption that equal access would result in comparably educated people. In subtle ways the concept of equality of opportunity came to be equated with the results of education--all students should perform equally or the system was unjust. When

remedial education and desegregation failed to produce comparable results, the relaxation of standards was the alternative selected to get around the problem (Bowden, 1981). Community colleges benefited from the emphasis on access because they defined as socially desirable the practice of accepting students regardless of their deficiencies and giving them a chance.

Now, however, the pendulum is swinging back toward meritocracy and community colleges find themselves on the back of two horses galloping in opposite directions. Much of the confusion about mission and identity stems from this dilemma. Minorities are no longer graduating from segregated school systems and are beginning to raise with some insistence the question of access to what? (Olivas, 1979) Legislators are demonstrating limited tolerance for educational inflation where students attend school for longer periods of time to avoid downward social mobility. Those who earned degrees when the possession of such credentials implied both a higher level of literacy and enhanced employment opportunities have become disenchanted with a system that produces credentials guaranteeing neither and with increased public costs. Of course, the roots of many of these problems lie beyond community colleges, but their impact does not.

During the past two decades community colleges have vigorously pursued the expansion of mission and clientele. Leaders have operated under the assumption that numbers and diversity would translate into political support and dollars. The events of these decades have left community colleges with more part-time students who require the same services as full-time students but who do not generate the same revenues; with increasing numbers of remedial students whose previous educational attainments make them more

costly to serve effectively; with a growing diversity of expensive services, such as child care centers, expanded financial aid offices, tutors and learning centers; and with greatly expanded delivery systems including colleges without walls, television media centers and other technological and human resource commitments. This explosion of clienteles, services, enrollments and delivery systems has not been matched by corresponding commitments of additional dollars from local, state, or federal sources. Increasing administrative costs, reduced student service, declining book acquisitions and increased use of lower paid adjunct faculty, all provide evidence of tension between continued expansion and available resources.

Two issues of paramount concern have arisen out of the confrontation between increasingly constrained resource allocations and the aspirations of the movement for continuing growth and mission expansion. The first of these involves quality, a topic that is only slighlty less painful for many community college leaders than was sex for Victorians. Given fixed resources, numbers and quality vary inversely: the more you do of anything, the less likely you are to do it well. The assumption that quality can be held constant by increasing efficiency overlooks totally the labor intensive nature of higher education as well at the fact that the community colleges are already extraordinarily efficient institutions by most standards that can be applied.

The second issue involves faculty commitment, defined as the ability to recognize educational priorities, agreement that priorities are appropriate, willingness to contribute to priorities and a belief that progress is being

made in their achievement. Faculty commitment is important because without it administrative priorities for change cannot be translated into educational experiences for students.

Hirschman's three categories of "exit", "voice", and "loyalty" are useful ways of depicting faculty commitment. Exit means contributing to the minimum level required to maintain membership. Loyalty involves a behavioral commitment to achieving educational priorities. (Hirschman, 1970) Voice implies overt resistance to educational priorities. Three separate research sources (Cross, 1981; Cohen and Brawer, 1977; Richardson et al, 1981) as well as many community college administrators, agree that the behavior of a majority of the faculty in community colleges toda is best characterized by the exit option. Less than a fourth exhibit loyalty while a smaller percentage actively resist administrative priorities. The exit group is sometimes characterized by the term "burn out" wich is more acceptable socialiy. It should be noted that exit faculty often maintain their commitment to their colleagues and to teaching students they believe to be capable of benefiting from their efforts. They are simply unavailable to assist in implementing administrative priorities.

The pressures of attempting to achieve new priorities with limited resources has proven frustrating to many faculty exhibiting loyalty. The movement seems to be from loyalty to exit suggesting that over time, given current stability of employment, the number of faculty committed to achieving institutional priorities may continue to decline.

The continuous expansion of community college mission has thus been a strain on human as well as financial resources. Most full-time community college

faculty are well prepared to teach academic students who are credible candidates for the baccalaureate degree. A lesser number have the skills and experience to provide career related instruction. Few have either the competence or commitment to work with students whose lack of literacy skills suggest their accomplishments will probably never exceed modest improvements in reading or writing.

Few states have analyzed the costs of dealing with seriously under-prepared students. The more common approach, as in Arizona, has been to fund remedial efforts through the same formula as the transfer program. Since effective services to the under-prepared, the handicapped or other special groups are often more costly than teaching transfer students, some of the costs of mission expansion have been funded by taking resources away from existing programs through such techniques as using more part-time faculty and establishing higher minimum numbers to keep advanced classes.

Faculty have been affected by this process in several ways.

1. Where faculty have been willing to contribute to the development of new programs and services to meet the needs of new clientele, the financial resources have commonly been less than the minimum they judged necessary for effective programs resulting in feelings of frustration.
2. The extensive use of adjuncts has been justified by pointing to student evaluations which reported no significant differences in student satisfaction between classes taught by part-timers and those by the full-time staff. This has led to problems of self-image for

full-time faculty who interpret these statements as implying that anyone can come in off the street and with little or no preparation do as well as they.

3. Perhaps most important of all, faculty see themselves increasingly in a no-win situation. They have more students who have more serious deficiencies and they are expected to teach them effectively with fewer resources. One result has been loss of commitment as faculty question their opportunities for success and find the odds against them lengthening.

Bob McCabe, Chancellor of Miami-Dade Community College, summarized the problem this way in a recent interview: "I wouldn't know how to deal with a class if I had people reading on a fifth grade level who were trying to compete in a college level class. I don't think our faculty do either. We discouraged many good faculty by putting them in a position where they really couldn't do a good job. If there is anything that can ruin an institution, it is taking away from faculty the ability to succeed." (Dubocq. 1981)

The community college is at an historic crossroad in terms of its mission. One route leads toward the folk school organized around the needs of adults and focused on cultural or vocational interests not requiring degree attainment. The second and more historic route involves concentration on programs and services designed to assist students attain the baccalaureate degree or entry to an occupation that could not have been attained without education beyond the high school. The basic incompatibility of these two directions under conditions of fiscal restraint is evidenced not only by the

tensions which currently surround discussions of community college missions, but by the arrangements that have evolved in other nations for adult continuing education. In Germany, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands and other Western European countries, separate institutions have been established to meet the needs of part-time adult students whose interests are not degree oriented. In the American community college, "the all things to all people" perspective may eventually need to give way to a more focused set of purposes.

The choice for many community colleges is to continue their present course toward becoming folk schools or to narrow their focus by returning to an earlier set of priorities. This issue is directly related to concerns about quality as well as the decline in faculty commitment. Many faculty believe that the transfer function and career education should be core concerns. They do not agree that mission expansion has been accomplished without declines in quality and they refuse to support new responses or the latest administrative innovation. Many administrators, on the other hand, believe mission expansion is both desirable and necessary. If full-time faculty will not cooperate, they will find part-time faculty who will. They believe the nature of the experience they offer is not significantly altered by the methods they employ. The determinition, of which of these two directions is preferable, hinges on one's conception of why commmunity colleges were founded and why they receive support from public sources.

Historically, community colleges were established to provide access to postsecondary education for low income students, for those whose academic preparation was undistinguished and for those who were limited to a specific

geographic locale. Access meant the opportunity to attain the first two years of a baccalaureate degree or to achieve entry level skills for an occupation requiring advanced training beyond the secondary school. It did not mean providing additional opportunities for people to learn how to play bridge, decorate cakes or repair automobiles for fun and profit. It did not mean transferring the costs of preparing nurses from hospitals to property taxes, nor did it mean subsidizing businesses and industry by providing on-site education for employees. Likewise, it did not mean assuming responsibility for helping remedial adults to self-actualize through programs where the objective was retention rather than definable progress toward degrees.

As historic missions have ceased to provide the growth to which community colleges have been accustomed, new missions have been sought. The process is not unique to community colleges. Institutions, once established, take on a life of their own and seek expanded responsibilities to insure their continuing well-being. When polio was conquered in the mid-fifties, the March of Dimes turned its attention to birth defects. So it has been with community colleges. As original missions ceased to provide the needed growth, new missions have emerged. This is not to say that the new needs are unimportant or that they should not be addressed. It is to say that in responding to new needs, it is important not to lose sight of original purposes or to jeopardize the quality with which those purposes are achieved by attempting more good things at any given time than constituents are willing to support.

How can trustees of Arizona community colleges address these issues? Some or all of the following alternatives might be considered:

1. Work with the State Board in its current effort to review its mission and scope statement for community colleges and to rewrite it in operational terms. If meaningful discussions about mission are to take place with legislators, faculty or other constituents, the definitions must be sufficiently precise to permit a determination of whether a particular activity does or does not fit within a specific mission.
2. Encourage administrators to experiment with establishing priorities by determining which among the many services and activities offered are the most essential to their community. While the mission and scope statement should be the same for all community colleges in a state, institutional priorities should vary depending upon the characteristics of the local community. In establishing priorities, boards should consult with a wide range of constituents including community representatives, faculty and students.
3. Ask administrators to determine the inputs and outcomes necessary to ensure the level of quality considered appropriate in priority programs. Inputs include such characteristics as faculty qualifications, class size and support services. Output variables involve measures of student achievement and persistence.
4. Ask for information about the costs necessary to achieve the level of quality considered essential.
5. Communicate an emphasis on quality, the associated costs and the consequences of alternative funding levels to legislators and other funding sources.
6. Consider offering only the amount of instruction that can be accomplished at the necessary level of quality with the funds

provided. This will be difficult because it assumes funding will be less than amounts requested and that the logical response is to serve fewer students, that is to say, make reductions in quantity rather than quality.

7. Take a careful look at the courses offered on a self-supporting basis. The theory has been that the general public and the legislature have no business questioning such course offerings as belly-dancing and dog obedience if boards are able to demonstrate through accounting procedures that such courses do not result in the expediture of tax dollars. The Breneman study suggest that a few courses of this type in each state generate a disproportionate amount of adverse reaction. (Breneman and Nelson, 1981) Trustees should raise the question of whether the cost of some of the courses offered in terms of public credibility and support exceed the value of offering them.

Of all the alternatives open to board members, however, the most important may well be the questions they ask about the institutions they govern. The question foremost in many of the meetings I have attended during the past several years has been, "How do we get more money to carry out our mission as we now define it?" Perhaps the time is near when it may be more important to ask, "Given available resources, what priorities should we consider to make certain we do really important jobs well."

In the final analysis, trustees have the responsibility for determining the appropriate balance between new and traditional missions. The job has never been more important. Unless the issue is addressed promptly and rigorously, the trustee role may well be preempted by legislative dictates.

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